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NSC BRIEFING

8 January 1954

BLOODSHED MAY BE INEVITABLE
AT PANMUNJOM

State Department
review completed

- I. Disorders involving bloodshed at Panmunjom on or about 23 January are beginning to look inevitable, regardless of whether India releases the prisoners.
- II. The 22,000 anti-Communist prisoners are well-organized for any eventuality.

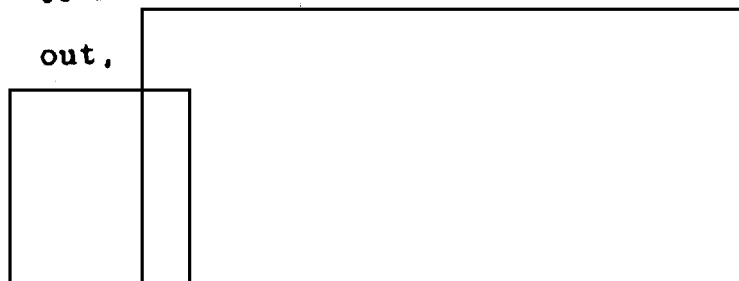
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III. If prisoners are not released on
schedule, they are almost certain
to riot and attempt a mass break-
out,



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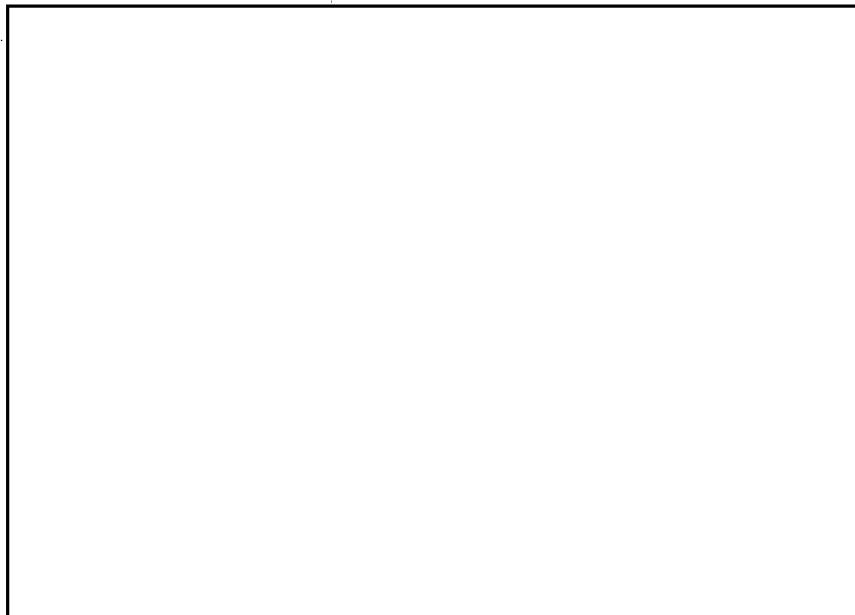
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IV. If prisoners are not released on schedule, Rhee would feel impelled to take some action to effect their release.

A. He is emotional over detention of Korean nationals by a foreign power.



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V. Any attempt by Rhee, probably effected by police troops under Gen. Won, would, by the truce terms, have to be counteracted by UNC action.

A. While Rhee would be reluctant to risk a UN-South Korean clash, he might gamble that the US would choose not to uphold the truce rather than to shoot down South Koreans.

B. The fact that he would be violating the truce would not deter Rhee since his agreement not to obstruct the truce expires a few days after 23 January.

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VI. The continued detention of POW's might become, for Rhee, justification for initiating unilateral military action against the Communists.

A. His recent statements, however, have emphasized the "right" rather than the "intention" to attack northward.

B. There are no indications that he is preparing to renew the war.

VII. If the prisoners are not released, the Communists would likely respond with heavy propaganda exploitation of what they would term acceptance of their position, meanwhile standing by to exploit any possible incidents between South Korean, and Indian or US forces.

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VIII. Even if the prisoners are released, as now seems probable, there is a likelihood of bloodshed.

- A. Possibly anti-Communist leaders in the southern camp will dictate death on the night of 22 January for any prisoners who have wavered in their determination not to go home or who may be suspected agents.
- B. These leaders might attempt a massacre of the 350 pro-Communist (including 21 Americans) in the northern camp.
- C. There might be a mass breakout prior to 22 January by prisoners who fear retaliation from the anti-Communist leaders.

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D. Although more remote, Rhee's emotionalism over India might cause him to order a breakout in advance of 22 January.

E. As Ambassador Briggs has said, "Rhee does not hesitate to pollute the stream of US-Korean relations whenever he deems it to his interests."

IX. If the prisoners are released on schedule, the Communists are certain to exploit the situation for propaganda stressing the illegality of the release and the "forcible retention" of the prisoners.

A. They are likely by subversion to create maximum disorder and bloodshed during the release, in much the same way they did on Koje Island while under UNC detention.

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- B. Less probable is that they would commit one of the North Korean divisions opposite Panmunjom to forcibly seize the POW's. We don't think this issue is important enough to them to risk a renewal of the war, however.
- C. They would be more likely to exercise this capability if South Korean forces moved first, thus making Communist retaliation appear as an act of self-defense.

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X. India has indicated that it agrees with the UN Command that its troops cannot legally hold the POW's beyond 22 January.

A. Nehru is under pressure from Peiping and pro-Communist advisers in the foreign ministry to delay the release.

B. India is planning to have the UN General Assembly reconvened on 9 February, and a decision to hold the prisoners until that date, while not expected, is possible.

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- XII. Tension among the Indians and the prisoners at Panmunjom being built up largely because of New Delhi's indecision and South Korean threats.
- XIII. The US is sufficiently involved so that if disorders break out we will suffer international embarrassment as well as defeat on the propaganda front.

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